



Ferghana Valley Field Study

Mercy Corps Central Asia

*Reducing the Potential for Conflict
through Community Mobilization*



May 2003



Mercy Corps

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1. Foreword

The *Ferghana Valley Field Study* was prompted by an institutional commitment to document and disseminate lessons learned and stimulate discussions relating to best-practices – within Mercy Corps as well with colleague agencies and donors. The study focuses on an analysis of community mobilization as an approach to reduce the potential for conflict and is designed for those interested in conflict mitigation and implicit approaches to peace-building.

The study is based on the findings of a three-week field visit to the Ferghana Valley in May 2003 to look at Mercy Corps' two USAID-funded community mobilization programs. The findings provide an interim insight and will be reviewed and revised at the end of the programs. Over 45 groups of different stakeholders in the community mobilization programs were interviewed in groups and individually, including community members, community groups, local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), program staff, program managers, other organizations and donors. In total over 90 people were interviewed and the findings triangulated in order to find the most accurate representation of opinion and to identify where different opinions and beliefs exist between the varying participants in the programs. In addition, a desk study was conducted of background reading material.

Thanks are due to the numerous people who have contributed ideas, experience and knowledge into *Ferghana Valley Field Study* including staff and partners in Central Asia, the USAID mission and Mercy Corps' headquarters staff. It is not possible to name everyone, but particular thanks go to the communities as well as Mercy Corps' teams in the Ferghana Valley for their time, commitment, passion and hospitality.

Anna Young

2. Executive Summary

Mercy Corps has been developing programs in Central Asia's Ferghana Valley using a conflict lens since the completion of a needs assessment in 2000, which identified multiple destabilizing factors in the region, including poor resource allocation, inter-ethnic tensions, illicit trade, economic decline, environmental degradation, unemployment and religious extremism. The two USAID-funded, three-year community mobilization programs, the Community Action Investment Program (CAIP) and the Peaceful Communities Initiative (PCI), use community mobilization methodologies as a vehicle to promote peaceful change and to reduce the potential for community-based conflict.

Mercy Corps views community mobilization as **the process of engaging communities to identify community priorities, resources, needs and solutions in such a way as to promote representative participation, good governance, accountability and peaceful change.** The program design draws on community mobilization experience in other countries, but retains the ability to be flexible and responsive to the specific needs and capacities of the Ferghana Valley.

The *Ferghana Valley Field Study* examines the approaches taken to reduce the potential for conflict, and the context in which community mobilization is taking place. It raises issues regarding measurement of impact and questions of sustainability for projects, relationships and conflict prevention approaches within communities.

The study identifies six key themes within the community mobilization process as pertinent to the conflict mitigation objective, and it analyzes how these have been approached:

- Targeting key stakeholders for sustainable change.
- Addressing community perceptions of conflict – not projecting external analysis onto local populations.
- Building a program approach around positive examples in local cultures, traditions and institutions.
- Promoting and modeling transparency and accountability.
- Addressing issues pertaining to and of concern to youth.
- Involving a broad range of Civil Society actors including government and local NGOs.

Based on assessments, contextual analysis and lessons learned in development practice, both CAIP and PCI staff have concluded that the programs can be assumed to be contributing toward conflict prevention if they meet the following four criteria, which are also measures of strengthening Civil Society:

- Increased shared resources between and within communities and the skills to manage them sustainably.
- Increased positive contact and sustained relations between and within communities, both general and individual.
- Increased knowledge and understanding between and within communities.
- Communities develop, adopt and take ownership of new problem solving skills.

After extensive and ongoing analysis of the situation, the team has adopted the opinion that it is reasonable to assume that progress in these four areas will lead to achieving the goal of reduction in conflict potential.

The study concludes that community mobilization programs can be an effective way to meet these criteria and thus reduce the potential for conflict in the Ferghana Valley. This is particular because they address community-identified needs from the grassroots perspective, while at the same time communicating new skills and approaches. In addition, the process is highly respected and prized by community members, as was consistently articulated during the course of this three-week study.

However, the study cautions that sustainable peaceful development is dependent on multiple organizations, national and international, simultaneously tackling the root causes and the underlying tensions at the macro level as well as the community level. On their own the CAIP and PCI programs cannot prevent an increase in tensions in the Ferghana Valley. They will have longer lasting impact if they are implemented in coordination with programs, addressing the macro issues not only in the Valley but also in the rest of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

3. Introduction

The Ferghana Valley, divided between Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and with ethnic divisions refusing to fit neatly inside each country's borders, has been identified as a potential area for conflict since before the break up of the Soviet Union. The high population density of approximately 11 million people combined with an ethnically diverse population and the scarcity and mismanagement of natural resources makes it vulnerable to internal and external provocation.¹ In her report *The Challenge of Regional Cooperation in Central Asia* (United States Institute of Peace), Anara Tabyshalieva writes:

The many sources of conflict affecting Central Asia in various combinations which can be divided into several overlapping categories, including socio-economic, demographic, ecological, political, ideological, cultural, psychological and geopolitical – have all converged in the Ferghana Valley.... While the three states have made some attempts at reform, the situation throughout the region continues to deteriorate economically, politically and socially... (and these) factors are likely to contribute to further instability in the region. (24)

To date there have been relatively few ethnically based conflicts in the Ferghana Valley. This bears testament to the fact that coping mechanisms exist in local populations for resolving and reducing tensions. However, recent history elsewhere, such as the Yugoslav conflicts, also demonstrates that peaceful co-existence should not be taken for granted, particularly where quality of life is poor and there are perceptions of inequalities between the populations.²

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The borders of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan all converge in the Ferghana Valley.

¹ Approximately 6.8 million of the 11 million residents of the Ferghana Valley are in Uzbekistan. Of ethnic minorities more than 700,000 Uzbeks live in southern Kryrgyzstan, 300,000 Krygyz in Uzbekistan and 1.4 million Uzbeks in Tajikistan (Tabyshalieva, Anara. *The Challenge of Regional Cooperation in Central Asia*, United States Institute of Peace, 1999: 23).

² This study does not include a history of the region. For further reading see the International Crisis Group reports at www.intl-crisis-group.org including *Central Asia: Border Disputes and Conflict Potential*, April 2002 and, the Forum on Early Warning and Early Response's *Early Warning Report on the Ferghana Valley*, December 2001.

Mercy Corps has been working in the Ferghana Valley since 1994, initially with a range of programs including small loans in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan and emergency assistance in Tajikistan. In 2000, the organization undertook a substantial assessment in the region to re-examine the development needs, priorities and vulnerabilities of the population. The assessment concluded that the potential for conflict was a real and present threat in the Ferghana Valley and therefore to the stability of all three Central Asian countries.³ The assessment identified inequitable resource allocation and lack of access to sufficient livelihoods to be of primary concern, and stressed the need for enhancing cross border cooperation and understanding. Subsequently, all of Mercy Corps' programs focusing on this region have been designed using a conflict lens, in order to ensure that program impact not only improves quality of life, but also reduces the potential for conflict within and between communities living in the valley. In October 2001 and May 2002 Mercy Corps' program activity expanded significantly with the start of two USAID-funded community mobilization programs, totaling almost \$19 million, called the Peaceful Communities Initiative (PCI) and the Community Action Investment Program (CAIP).⁴ While the two programs have significant differences, both share similar goals of addressing the potential for conflict through community mobilization. Mercy Corps defines community mobilization as **the process of engaging communities to identify community priorities, resources, needs and solutions in such a way as to promote representative participation, good governance, accountability and peaceful change.**

A wealth of literature discusses definitions of conflict, violent or non-violent, in different global contexts. For the purposes of this study, conflict is defined using the working definition taken from the book *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace – Or War*.⁵

The conflict we challenge is violent, destructive conflict. Some people use the word conflict to refer to healthy disagreements and struggles. For ease of discourse we use the term to mean negative, unhealthy, usually violent interactions. (7)

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4. Conflict Framework

To those living outside the region, conflict in the Ferghana Valley evokes images of cross-border scuffles between villages of different ethnicities or large-scale riots. Many analysts see the Ferghana Valley as a potential tinderbox, where one spark, or incident, might quickly become out of control and spread through the region. While people living along the border may express concerns about potential future disputes or refer to disagreements between villages, no one during the course of this study expressed concern about imminent violent outbursts. In the urban centers this concern is practically non-existent, although some people in centers where massacres took place in the late 1980s and early 1990s express concern that it could happen again. Similarly, while external analysts point to religious extremism as a serious underlying tension, this concern is not shared, or at least not openly expressed, by the population at large.⁶

³The Heart of Central Asia, Mercy Corps' Multi-sectoral Assessment of the Ferghana Valley.

⁴USAID-funded CAIP programs are also being implemented by four other international organizations in Central Asia: Cooperative Housing Foundation, ACDI/VOCA, Aga Khan Foundation, and Rural Reconstruction and Development Program (UNDP).

⁵ Anderson, Mary B. *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace – Or War*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999.

⁶ For recent analysis of Islam in Central Asia see International Crisis Group reports at www.intl-crisis-group.org including, *Central Asia: Islam and the State* and *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Responding to Hizb ut –Tahrir*.

Although communities and stakeholders in the region do not currently anticipate imminent large-scale violent conflict, levels of tension do visibly exist within and between communities and also between community members and state institutions. These manifest themselves in multiple ways, including fights over water access, quarrels and fights with border guards, frustrations expressed by youth, anger toward government and disputes within the communities. Table 1 (page 9) outlines the major causes of conflict as well as the potential actors in any given conflict, according to analysts in the region.

The two most obvious or visible causes expressed in secondary literature and by the communities themselves as the root of the problems in the Ferghana Valley are **weak and corrupt governance structures** and **resource allocation between countries due to the borders**. There is common agreement that unless these issues are more effectively addressed at a macro level by national and international governments, the United Nations (UN), World Bank, large corporations and other international policy makers, the interventions of organizations working at the community level will be of limited impact for the long-term.

The effects of these root causes manifest themselves in multiple ways. They are listed as *underlying tensions/conflict triggers* in Table 1 and are the surface level reasons why small scale conflicts do erupt in the Ferghana Valley. Addressing these underlying tensions is critical, not only because many of them are issues which can be tackled immediately with relative success within a defined area, but they also negatively impact the daily lives of the local populations. Affecting root causes, e.g. governance structures, is a long-term goal, whereas increasing freedom of movement for border populations, for example, is an issue which can show immediate results. Mercy Corps' community mobilization programs attempt to directly address some of these immediate tensions (shaded in grey in the Table 1 and discussed throughout this study).

As part of a systematic conflict analysis it is also essential to identify where the *friction points* (both current and potential) between actors occur and at what levels. In the Ferghana Valley the potential for conflict exists at the international, national, community and domestic level. In order to target resources more efficiently and maximize impact, it is critical to identify the key players and whom it is possible to affect in terms of changing attitudes and approaches in the long-term.

Mercy Corps' community mobilization programs are designed to target actors at multiple levels. Table 1 highlights in grey the actors whom the programs aim to significantly impact. Most notably not addressed are:

- Tensions between local and national government (important stakeholders if the program is to make a sustainable impact beyond the immediate communities in which they are working).
- Communities and the security services at the borders (e.g. border guards and customs officials).
- Conflict at a domestic level.⁷

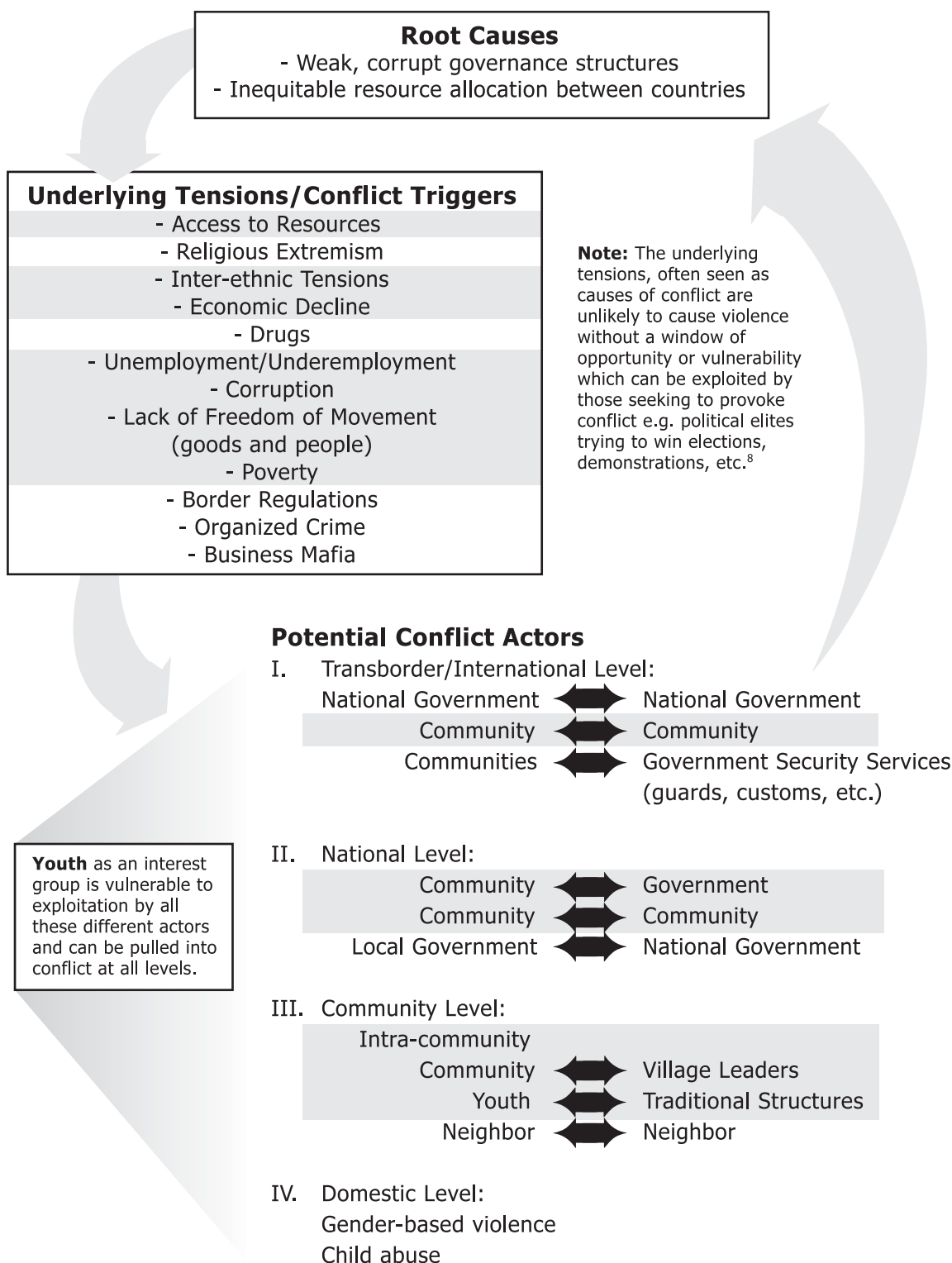
This is not necessarily a failure of the programs, which have a finite scope and limited resources. However, program staff should be aware of potential linkages that can and should be made with other interventions, and that relationships (or lack thereof) and events in these other areas will also impact the achievements of Mercy Corps' program.

⁷ Mercy Corps has directly addressed domestic violence through its Open Society Institute (Soros) funded program in the Ferghana Valley, Uzbekistan, which provides training at a household level in conflict resolution. It addresses border issues through a local partner in Tajikistan, but this is beyond the scope of this study.

Table 1

Areas of Potential Conflict in the Ferghana Valley⁸

Shaded Area = Mercy Corps program focus



⁸ For additional information refer to USAID and the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID)'s Conflict Assessment Frameworks see Bibliography.

5. Programmatic and Strategic Approach



Colin Spurway/Mercy Corps

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Children at a summer camp in the Ferghana Valley. Many youth who live only a few kilometers, or sometimes a few hundred meters apart, can only meet and interact through organized events such as the PCI youth camps.

CAIP and PCI are both relatively complex community mobilization programs, which work to empower communities to work together in a participatory manner to address the infrastructure and social needs of their own populations, at the same time developing sustainable skills in problem solving, consensus-building and accountability.⁹ The process also empowers communities to begin to identify and utilize existing resources within the communities and not to depend only on external assistance.¹⁰ Program implementation is built around teams of three to five community mobilizers, who each take responsibility for five to six communities each.

During a needs assessment of the Ferghana Valley in 2000, Mercy Corps interviewed over 1,600 households in 18 communities and conducted focus group discussions in these same communities. The assessment, which focused on examining development issues relating to water, sanitation, economic livelihood and agriculture, concluded that “Resource issues need to be addressed in order to prevent violence from occurring in the future.”¹¹ The USAID Request for Applications (RFA) issued in September 2001 was the result of a “bright ideas” competition within USAID and was based on USAID’s discussions of programmatic needs with Mercy Corps and other international and local stakeholders. It provided Mercy Corps with the opportunity to develop a program that could address

⁹ For more detailed descriptions of the programs contact the Mercy Corps Central Asia desk or visit www.mercycorps.org.

¹⁰ Appendix 1 outlines the community mobilization process in more detail.

¹¹ Mercy Corps. *The Heart of Central Asia, Mercy Corps’ Multi-sectoral Assessment of the Ferghana Valley*. 2000: 2.

some of these resource issues, but that would also take a comprehensive approach to conflict prevention in the selected communities through community mobilization, one of Mercy Corps' institutional core competencies.

PCI and the larger CAIP program were designed using Mercy Corps' Civil Society framework as a lens to ensure that program impact contributed to Civil Society strengthening in the region.¹² Both incorporate lessons learned from other community mobilization programs in Georgia, Serbia and Lebanon, while at the same time maintaining the flexibility to be able to pilot and then mainstream new ideas, and incorporate cultural positives. The Civil Society framework emphasizes the need to ensure that programs integrate and promote the principles of participation, accountability and peaceful change to all stakeholders. Although the program design was based on findings from the assessment and lessons learned from other Mercy Corps and non-Mercy Corps programs, flexibility was built into the program design to allow the teams to pilot new ideas, assess their impact and then mainstream them if they were successful.

Peaceful Communities Initiative (PCI)¹³

Started in October 2001, the USAID-funded Peaceful Communities Initiative is a three-year, transborder community mobilization program with the goal of reducing community-based conflict. The program aims to build trust between and within communities through a combination of social and infrastructure projects identified by Community Action Groups (CAGs). These groups are formed during the startup process and consist of community-elected representatives/leaders.¹⁴ PCI currently targets 28, primarily rural, communities located on borders or where a minority ethnic group resides within a majority population. Each team, composed of three members of Mercy Corps' staff and local NGO representatives from one of the three countries, is responsible for five or six communities. On average the program invests \$35,000 in each community, with projects including a variety of social activities and infrastructure projects such as sports leagues, festivals, youth camps, natural gas and water projects, school repair, etc.

Community Action Investment Program (CAIP)¹⁵

CAIP is a three-year, USAID-funded program to help prevent conflict and promote broad-based citizen dialogue and participation that started in May 2002. Mercy Corps works in partnership with World Education to achieve the program's objectives. It targets seventy-five communities in three countries of which 30 (currently 21 in the process of expanding to an additional nine) will be in the Ferghana Valley. A representative group from the communities identifies and selects priorities and selects the Community Action Group. Following a thorough contextual analysis, mobilizers select urban and semi-urban communities assessed to have a high potential for conflict. Investment is approximately \$75,000 per community with an increased focus on infrastructure projects, including water, natural gas, school repair, etc.

¹² For Mercy Corps' Civil Society Framework see Appendix 2.

¹³ In May 2003, PCI received an expansion that increases the amount of funding per community from approximately \$15,000 to \$35,000 and adds an additional eight communities to the program.

¹⁴ The community-based organizations are called Community Action Groups (CAGs) for CAIP and Community Initiative Groups (CIGs) for PCI. They are both essentially the same model of a group of elected community representatives who act as a focal point for Mercy Corps and lead the process in the villages. For the purpose of this study they are both referred to as CAGs.

¹⁵ In May 2003, CAIP received an expansion that will allow CAIP to expand into additional communities in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and to also cover four communities in Kyrgyzstan in the Ferghana Valley. In terms of CAIP, this study refers only to the work undertaken in the Ferghana Valley in Uzbekistan, May 2002-2003.

Key Similarities and Differences between CAIP and PCI		
	CAIP	PCI
Location	Targets urban and semi-urban communities.	Targets border communities, inter-ethnic communities and/or ethnic minorities living within the borders of another community.
Objectives	Key Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Participatory and democratic processes strengthened at the community level. - Improved community social services through community infrastructure projects. - Creation of sustainable and short-term jobs. 	Key Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase the ability of communities and CBOs to identify sources of conflict and participate in constructive dialogue to generate and implement solutions. - Improve the environment for inter-community cooperation and partnership through access and exchange of information and peer networking.
Budget	Average of \$75,000 per community with the emphasis on infrastructure projects.	Average of \$35,000 per community (after expansion) with a strong emphasis on cultural and social events.
Startup	Initial trust and confidence building through small projects of approximately \$2,000 - \$5,000.	Initial trust and confidence building through festivals and community activities.
Community Size	Average community size > 10,000. (target population 2,000 – 3,000) A community is usually defined as a Mahalla, the basic administrative unit of Uzbekistan. ¹⁶	Average community size < 10,000.
Countries	Operating in Uzbekistan (Ferghana Valley), Kyrgyzstan (Ferghana Valley, June 2003), Turkmenistan and Tajikistan.	Operating only in the Ferghana Valley in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.
Match	Community contribution 30% of total.	Community contribution 25% of total.
Teams/ Partners	Teams work directly with the communities, no official local partners. International partnership with World Education.	Local teams formed out of multi-ethnic, consortia of five local partners and Mercy Corps. Some stand-alone events, such as summer camps, are implemented by the local partners.

¹⁶ See Sievers, Eric W. Uzbekistan's Mahalla: From Soviet to Absolutist Residential Community Associations. *The Journal of International and Comparative Law at Chicago Kent* vol 2 (2002): 96.

6. Community Mobilization as a Conflict Reduction Strategy

Both CAIP and PCI are based on the premise that the potential for conflict can be reduced by addressing some of the basic infrastructure and social needs of the communities through a participatory decision-making process, at the same time transferring skill sets of assessment, consensus-based decision-making skills and joint problem solving to community selected representatives. Mercy Corps accomplishes this by training the field teams in facilitation techniques to work with the CAGs throughout the life of the program.

Community mobilization depends on the requisite time needed to establish trust and relationships within communities. CAIP and PCI are both designed as transitional and development – not emergency response – programs. Both programs are intended as proactive interventions to reduce the potential for conflict rather than a rapid response in areas where violence erupts. This means that these are not programs designed to respond to violence that erupts in non-selected communities once the program has begun.¹⁷ Sites were selected using an adaptation of potential conflict indicators developed by USAID¹⁸ and/or because there had been incidences of violence in those communities in the past. Once communities have been selected, Mercy Corps makes a time bound commitment to work with those communities and to work through issues, difficulties and challenges together until the end of the program.

6.1 Assumptions about reducing the potential for conflict

The community mobilization approach is founded on the belief that, through participatory and joint problem solving approaches, community members can address immediate issues of concern within their local environments (e.g. addressing water shortages due to mismanagement by upstream users, or improving access to schooling). By working together to address these problems, tensions will be reduced. At the same time the skills transferred will enable communities to work together more cooperatively when problems arise in the future.

Given the difficulties in measuring something “not happening” (e.g. conflict), a conflict prevention program must identify proxy criteria with which to measure whether or not the interventions can reasonably be assumed to meet that goal. Following the needs assessments in 2000, reading literature from other analysts of the region and an understanding of the issues which provoke and sustain conflict, the CAIP and PCI programs assume that the potential for conflict will be reduced if the four criteria below are met:

- There are increased, shared resources between and within communities and the skills to manage them sustainably.
- There are increased positive contacts and sustained relations between and within communities, both general and individual.
- There is increased knowledge of and understanding between and within communities.
- Communities develop, adopt and take ownership of new problem solving skills.

¹⁷ Communities currently experiencing violence require a different type of program, usually involving a more rapid response. The CAIP and PCI community mobilization approach requires time to establish trust and relationships.

¹⁸ These indicators were taken from an index developed by Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) in Macedonia.

After extensive and ongoing analysis of the situation, the team has adopted the opinion that it is reasonable to assume that progress in these four areas will lead to progress toward the goal of reduction in conflict potential.

6.2 Community selection

Throughout the community selection process, potential for conflict was the primary consideration for the teams although the criteria varied depending on whether the setting was rural or urban. For PCI, community selection was based on the identification of communities that were located on one of the borders or that were an ethnic island within another majority population. The tensions identified were primarily resource-based or due to frustrations because of isolation from other communities and a feeling of alienation from the government. CAIP aimed to identify communities with a high potential for conflict, primarily due to unemployment, frustrations access to state services, resources, poverty and ethnicity. The teams used an adaptation of the USAID Conflict Tensions Index¹⁹ to guide their assessments in the communities. The index was invaluable in providing an analytical framework for the teams, as well as providing insights into the broad range of tensions that might exist within the communities.

Donors and Mercy Corps' staff members for both programs agree that community selection is critical in contributing toward the reduction of the potential for conflict and in wise targeting of limited resources. As one team member stated, the number of communities worked in is relatively small compared to the total population in the Ferghana Valley.²⁰ In order to increase overall impact, communities were selected not only on need and existing tensions, but also based on the relationships with neighboring communities and the willingness of community leaders, both formal and informal, to take new ideas and skills and use them later.

In light of this, both programs committed substantial time to ensuring the most appropriate sites were selected using a combination of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA); group facilitation and consensus-building methodology; desk and literature surveys; consultations with other international organizations; and discussions with municipal and regional government authorities. Open and transparent relationships



Colin Spurway/Mercy Corps

Participatory Rural Appraisal provides an opportunity for organizations to really listen to and understand the needs, concerns and priorities of the communities in which they work. Here a mother and daughter participate in a community mapping exercise.

¹⁹ The index is adapted from the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) assessment tool in Macedonia.

²⁰ Mercy Corps estimates that its programs impact approximately two percent of the total population of the Ferghana Valley.

with USAID to convey the importance of “getting it right” led to donor support of this process focused approach, in spite of pressure to show results in a short time frame.

Urban versus Rural

Popular belief is that urban areas with denser, more transient populations are more difficult to work in. Experience from the CAIP urban and semi-urban locations has identified that, in actuality, there are both advantages and disadvantages to working in rural and urban locations. Work in urban communities is facilitated by the fact that the population is more educated and there are more skilled people available. Community leaders often have a better understanding of how to work with government bodies. In addition, the urban populations selected by CAIP are relatively settled, and community members already know each other, but are often busier and less focused. On the other hand, rural communities are usually poorer and have less access to resources and so are more enthusiastic about the infrastructure projects. Community leaders also usually have more influence in rural communities.



Mercy Corps PCI programs target border communities and minority ethnicities while CAIP works in urban and semi-urban settings with potential for conflict in them.

Crossing Borders – No Simple Task

Here is a typical example of what village populations face is in two neighboring PCI communities – Vorukh (Uzbekistan) and Ravot (Tajikistan) – that straddle the Uzbekistan-Tajikistan border and are 300 meters apart from one another. The foothills, which form a natural border between the two communities, are mined, and the direct road between the two communities has been closed. In order to visit the neighboring community across the border, villagers have to travel 35 kilometers, via an official border post.

When crossing the borders, villagers with passports are allowed to travel 50 kilometers into the neighboring country. Vorukh (Uzbekistan) villagers can enter Tajikistan officially but can not go further than Kanibadam raion without a visa. If they go further and are stopped by the police, they have to pay a penalty or bribe. Because license plates on cars distinguish the oblast where the car is registered, it is easy for police to know who to stop. Ravot (Tajikistan) villagers used to travel to markets in Kokand, as it is the cheapest and nearest market, however they can not travel there legally without a visa because it is beyond the acceptable distance. To complicate matters, even if they have a visa they are restricted in the number of goods they can bring back legally.

In addition, there are a large number of villagers who do not have an official passport and cannot officially travel outside their respective countries. After independence in 1991, the Uzbek government asked all citizens to exchange their Soviet passports for Uzbek passports. The passport exchange was easier for people in the urban areas than in the rural areas. Not all the villagers managed to exchange their passports, and those who did not have been given the official status of being “without citizenship.” These individuals are given an identification card, but are not qualified to apply for either exit visas or visas for other countries.

Although community mobilization programs do not solve all of the issues relating to border crossing, they provide a positive model, which shows that crossing borders is possible. Community members, who stopped travelling as the border controls tightened, started to cross again to attend festivals and tournaments which will hopefully lead to increased traffic in the future.

6.3 Maximizing people reached

Recent research on peace practices in relief and development work has paid considerable attention to investigating whether and how peace programs are targeting “key” people as opposed to “more” people.²¹ The premise is that in order to effectively build momentum for significant change, peace programs must find a way of linking potential leaders of change with the more general population at a socio-political level.

²¹ Anderson, Mary B. and Olson, Lara. *Confronting War: Critical Lessons for Peace Practitioners*. Collaborative for Development Action, 2003: 61. This publication presents the findings of the Reflecting on Peace Project, conducted by the Collaborative for Development Action (CDA) over a three-year period to learn more about international peace practices.

Although CAIP and PCI were designed before the results of the Reflecting on Peace Practice project were published, it is interesting to examine how the community mobilization process works at the micro level to target both *more* people (the general population) and *key* people (the leaders or opinion-formers) within the communities. Much of the community mobilization process focuses on intensive work with the community groups to develop their individual skills. The representatives of these groups who include teachers, school directors, doctors, nurses, respected elders, farmers, businessmen, grassroots government representatives and youth are not only dynamic individuals but also leaders – both formal and informal – within the community. At the same time, community meetings are designed as open forums, where a large, representative selection of the population participates in project selection and holds these leaders accountable for decisions made. At the start of the community mobilization processes, meetings are often facilitated and supported by the Mercy Corps team members, but as the confidence of groups grows the CAG members increasingly take on the facilitation role, thereby building direct links with their “constituency.” The social events, whether infrastructure project openings, sports leagues or cultural festivals provide an opportunity for “more” people to come together and for the participatory principles of PCI and CAIP to be communicated through shared experiences.



Colin Spurway/Mercy Corps

After the PRA exercises, a community meeting is held to discuss priorities and members of the community vote on the projects they believe to be of highest importance.

It is important to recognize that CAIP and PCI broadly target communities rather than interest groups within these communities, and individual participation in any of the activities is entirely voluntary. With the exception of some of the sporting activities, individuals are likely to be drawn from the general population rather than those elements most likely to provoke conflict e.g. political leaders with set agendas or disenfranchised youth. Targeting the broader communities does not necessarily mean that the programs will fail to reach out and influence these potentially volatile segments of society. Programs that change attitudes and behaviors within communities will hopefully enable leaders and citizens to eventually engage those who are not as yet fully committed to peaceful change. Also, some of these actors will be indirectly engaged through the volunteer labor of the projects where there is strong community pressure for all to participate, particularly in the manual labor but also in the opening celebrations.

6.4 Addressing community perceptions of conflict

The potential for conflict as identified through the analysis of numerous external organizations²² is not perceived in the same light by the communities and governments themselves. Conflict as a local term implies an outbreak of fighting between countries and no one verbalizes this as an imminent threat within the valley.²³ Similarly, concerns regarding religious extremism, expressed by outside observers, are not openly articulated. This is not to deny that these potential triggers for conflicts do not exist, but rather that they are not in the consciousness of the people in the communities – arguably the best time to be implementing conflict prevention programs (long before violence is imminent and appears inevitable).

After confusing experiences during the setup phase, when it became clear that references to potential conflict did not resonate with the communities, the CAIP project teams stopped referring directly to conflict when discussing the program. Instead they talk about, “reducing tensions within communities.” Members of the CAGs now consistently articulate the goal of the program as “building unity within the community and developing problem solving skills.”

PCI staff talk about building bridges within and between communities, and community members use similar vocabulary. Essentially all stakeholders share the same goal, but the vocabulary and concepts used is appropriately tailored to the audience.

Using social, cultural and infrastructure projects as vehicles through which to communicate and transfer key skills that support conflict prevention, Mercy Corps is able to address issues close to the hearts of community members and to engage in a language which is culturally appropriate and non-threatening. At the same time, the reality of implementing these programs, whether by mobilizing a community by bringing them together or by forging new or strengthening old relationships between communities, opens channels and creates understanding that will enable disputes or disagreements to be solved more constructively in the future.

Fuel as a Source of Tension

Communities often prioritize natural gas as their first or second project. Communities without natural gas are dependent on scarce wood for cooking fuel, which puts pressure on natural resources and causes tensions between and within communities. People are often forced to cut wood from the orchards in order to be able to cook and heat their homes – a desperate short-term measure which creates problems in the future. Installing natural gas helps reduce these tensions while at the same time linking people to government bodies responsible for maintaining this infrastructure.

²² See Bibliography for examples.

²³ Of all the communities interviewed during the research period, only one directly vocalized any concern about potential conflict and this was as concern about potential terrorist activity.

6.5 Building on local cultures, traditions and institutions

Both CAIP and PCI can partly attribute their successes to the fact that they have identified positive local traditions and customs and have capitalized upon them to promote peaceful change. This was initially intuitive, as teams piloted activities in the communities, but has become clearly articulated following the success of these approaches. These include building on the practice of community volunteer labor to address infrastructure needs and ensuring the inclusion of the respected elders of the community in the decision-making process. In addition, the youth summer camps, organized by PCI each year to promote youth leadership and participation in community decision-making, are supported by the adult population, primarily because the youth summer camps were widespread during the Soviet Union.

Another mechanism for reducing the potential for conflict is through joint celebrations. Celebrations of spring and Muslim holidays were not allowed during the Soviet Union and have revived since independence. All three countries celebrate more or less the same holidays. PCI has pushed the envelope by not only supporting these festivals, but by encouraging villages to have joint celebrations and come together to pool resources. These joint activities were expanded after successful pilots of joint spring festivities and seeing the extent to which community members appreciated and learned from other communities. One village in Sokh, Uzbekistan explained that they had celebrated Navruz last year for the first time in a neighboring village in Kyrgyzstan and were delighted to be able to return the hospitality this year.

Building on Local Practice

The practice of “hashar” or community labor to build community infrastructure was common during the Soviet period and continues today. Several communities identified roads or mosques that had been built prior to Mercy Corps’ programs. What differs, according to the opinions of the community members interviewed, is the sense of ownership felt in these projects, “Previously labor was expected, now it is willingly contributed,” said one female member of a Community Action Group.

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Colin Spurway/Mercy Corps

Communities often provide volunteer labor as their contribution to the infrastructure projects.

6.6 Transparency and accountability

Accountability and transparency form one of the key components in Mercy Corps' Civil Society framework. In the CAIP and PCI programs, it can also be seen to be contributing directly towards reducing the potential for conflict by raising awareness of the current environment.

Politically manipulated conflicts are often ignited due to lack of understanding and consequently fear of the “other side.” The tightening of borders and subsequent reduced freedom of movement and communication have led to perceptions and misperceptions of the “other” whether within the borders of a country or across the boundary. Water mismanagement is often reported as sabotage by the other ethnicity. Ethnic minorities often feel that they have been neglected due to their ethnicity while majority populations living by the border feel that they have been marginalized because of their location. Engaging in cross boundary and/or inter-ethnic projects and programs promotes transparency and an understanding of each others problems, challenges and way of life. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan often perceive that quality of life is better on the Uzbekistan side of the border. The exchanges between team members, local NGOs and communities help everyone to understand that many of the hardships faced are in fact similar in all three countries. One PCI staff member overheard a conversation between two young girls in Sokh, Uzbekistan complaining about the amount of housework they had to do, “That girl in Sharkobad (a Kyrgyz girl), doesn't have to do this,” one said. “Of course she does,” said the other, “she was telling us about it at the last youth festival we had.”

The infrastructure project review cycle encourages a dialogue between the CAG and government offices. This has provided the community with better official information rather than rumor or gossip. In Koryantok, Uzbekistan, a community realized as it came to implement a water project that the reason that its village did not have clean water was not only because of a lack of political will, but because the project was extremely costly and complex. Through a participatory process they came to understand that the government at the local level also suffers from lack of resources.

Interestingly, although not in its key objectives, CAIP has also promoted joint training for CAG members from several communities and encourages community members to attend the opening ceremonies of other communities.²⁴ Several communities commented enthusiastically on the value they perceived of being able to learn from each other and exchange ideas. In countries that do not promote freedom of movement and free exchange between different cities, this building of linkages is highly valued by community members. These cross visits started as pilot activities, but have become common practice in both programs following positive evaluations by the communities.

This level of cross-cultural and cross-sectoral exchange does not in and of itself prevent conflict. However, it does encourage and foster an understanding of the problems and challenges facing all those currently living in the Ferghana Valley, as well as reduce susceptibility to manipulation by those wanting to play the “ethnic discrimination” card to enflame emotions and tensions.

²⁴ Opening ceremonies are formal events celebrating the completion of infrastructure projects and give recognition to those who have been involved in the process. They usually involve feasts and cultural displays of dancing and singing.

6.7 Media

The media is playing an increasing role in Mercy Corps' community mobilization programs. Local television and newspapers are invited to opening ceremonies, and to cover special interest stories for the programs. PCI recently hired a public relations representative for Tajikistan to forge stronger relationships with the media. This is primarily to try to spread the message to a broader audience than just those communities directly participating in CAIP or PCI. By publicizing positive examples of inter-ethnic cooperation, government support and community mobilization, Mercy Corps hopes to counter leaders and interest groups who use the media to promote messages of ethnic differences, segregation and discrimination in all three countries. Although Mercy Corps has not yet developed a model for tracking impact of media exposure, it expects that better media exposure will promote a positive model for cooperation and joint problem solving to a large audience, and that the impact will be felt beyond the selected communities for CAIP and PCI.

6.8 Social versus infrastructure projects

Both CAIP and PCI divide activities in the communities into two categories: **social** projects (e.g. sports and cultural events, festivals, seminars and openings) and **infrastructure** projects (e.g. water and natural gas projects, school and cultural center repair, road construction, etc.).²⁵ However, the emphasis is different for each program. CAIP uses these social events primarily as a mechanism to facilitate and strengthen the process of implementing infrastructure projects while PCI views them as stand alone events in themselves. This difference in approach is partly determined by resource allocation but also by the different dynamics of the programs.

Both programs place weight on the importance of the opening ceremonies as a means not only to celebrate the achievement of the community and to promote transparency of the project activity, but also to bring key players together from inside and outside the community. The openings provide an opportunity to demonstrate the success of the project and show off the artistic talents of the community through singing, dancing and poetry. At a recent opening ceremony in a CAIP community in Uchkurgan, the event was also attended by members of three other CAIP Mahallas and the Vice Mayor stayed not only for the opening ceremony but also the festivities afterwards.

For the PCI program, the social events were a key trust building exercise when teams started to work in the communities. Due to the limited amount of funds available and the sensitivities of cross border and inter-ethnic work, PCI felt from the outset that it was critical that the community mobilization process should be well under way **before** infrastructure projects began. However communities were often suspicious of yet another international organization conducting needs assessments and were concerned that PCI would leave without providing any results.

The social projects often only cost a few hundred dollars per community, but provided a means of demonstrating commitment to the populations as well as injecting a sense of fun into the process. Initially social projects were perceived by the teams as a way of gaining trust and acceptance by the villages. However, as the program evolved it became apparent that these projects had value in and of themselves. One interviewee referred to them as the, "glue which cements relationships and enables the sustainability of infrastructure projects." Team members all report how during these initial

²⁵ For a summary of infrastructure projects see Appendix 3.



Opening ceremonies provide an opportunity for the community to celebrate the time, work and unity they have demonstrated to implement the project. Here women, dressed in national costume, applaud speeches before performing local dances and songs.

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activities the momentum came primarily from PCI, but how over the past eighteen months the initiatives have increasingly come from the communities, for inter-village events as well as stand alone activities. Emphasis is increasingly being placed on leagues and ongoing activities rather than one-off events.

Inevitably questions are raised about the sustainability of projects such as inter-village chess tournaments or continuing youth camps after the program ends. However, sufficient evidence exists already of spontaneous events being organized by community group leaders without Mercy Corps' support. Some of the villages have organized a football league around Sokh, and a Tajik woman has organized a cultural festival in Kyrgyzstan. This indicates an interest in continuation of community activities if sufficient energy is given to empowering communities to take ownership of these events and responsibility for the future.

Communities Taking the Initiative

In Urganjibog, the CAG decided to build a sports field at the school that Mercy Corps was repairing. Residents said that they felt empowered by the school repair and collected money from parents and community members and constructed a playing field in less than two weeks.

The community members also articulate an understanding of the importance of projects to “build bridges and create friendships,” as articulated by one CAG member. If asked to distinguish between the social and infrastructure projects, they place greater value on the importance of infrastructure projects as solving real needs in the community, but see the two activities as inseparable. Furthermore, while infrastructure projects may or may not join communities across borders, the social projects inevitably achieve this because they involve multiple communities.

6.9 Engaging youth

Central Asian society puts a strong emphasis on the role of elders in the community. Traditionally these people take decisions with little youth involvement. As one CAG member expressed, “Young people cannot contribute fully to making decisions in the community until they have experienced life.”

With an estimated 50 percent of the population under the age of 18 and unemployment at an all-time high in urban and rural communities, there is a real potential for the disenfranchisement of youth resulting in frustration and negative social behavior. In addition, the creation of borders and restrictions on freedom of movement reduces the opportunities for interaction between ethnic groups and nationalities, which is creating potential problems for the future. People over the age of 35 talk about friends and relatives from before the time when borders were tightened. The younger generation does not have the memories of these relationships and lacks the opportunities for interaction. Also Russian, once spoken by the majority of people, is being taught less and less in schools since independence, particularly in Uzbekistan.

CAIP and PCI have taken two different but equally interesting approaches to increasing the participation of youth in the communities, building relationships and trying to foster a sense of ownership of community-based issues.²⁶

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When the CAGs were first formed, PCI encouraged communities to elect young people as representatives. Within the cultural context this was not met enthusiastically by the communities because young people were not felt to be “qualified” as leaders. PCI team members decided that international summer camps that focused on fostering leadership skills (as well as promoting tolerance and understanding) could overcome this hurdle. Although these camps have been widely applauded (one adult asked if there could be camps for adults this year!) and have created relationships and friendships that spontaneously continue between children during the year, they have not led to significantly increased participation of the youth in the CAGs. This was probably unrealistic given the cultural context and bearing in mind that very few young people in the United States or Europe are actively involved with projects relating to infrastructure. What the youth camps did initiate, though, was the formation of youth initiative groups that discuss issues relating to young people and help to organize youth events. A youth representative then sits on the CAG to share information and inform the young people of what is taking place. One youth group in Pahtobuston asked PCI for help forming a drama group, which will perform a play promoting tolerance throughout six of the PCI communities.

²⁶ Mercy Corps defines youth broadly as 16-25 year-olds.



A summer camp in the Ferghana Valley. These camps provide the opportunity for young people to learn about each other's cultures and customs and develop new skills together.

In addition, many of the cultural, sports and social events are particularly targeted at young people, primarily because youth issues are prioritized by the CAGs that see the value of making connections between young people. Several of the villages report increased communication between children in neighboring villages as well as letter writing to young people further away.

Sporting events are particularly valuable, not only because they are a way to bring young people together, but because they also target a different audience of young people who are physically active but who are not necessarily engaged with other peace-building processes. Most of the activities in the communities tend to engage those people who are already committed to participating in improving quality of life, and the children selected for the initial youth camps are already the informal youth leaders. Sporting events provide an opportunity to reach out to some of the more marginalized youth. One community leader reported that in the football team there were four young men playing who were rehabilitating from drug use.

Building Relationships with Youth

Sokh is an island of Uzbekistan situated inside Kyrgyzstan with an almost exclusively ethnic Tajik population. Children living in Charbak, Kyrgyzstan have to walk about two kilometers through Sokh to go to school in Sogment, Kyrgyzstan. These children used to report being harassed and bullied as they walked to and from school by the children in Sokh. Recently they have started to report that this harassment has been reduced following increased contact through the girl's volleyball league, summer camps, quiz shows, Navruz festivals and the joint youth initiative groups.

CAIP also prioritizes youth issues as critical to reducing the potential for conflict. One of the CAIP partners is World Education and it provides a dedicated staff person who is responsible for ensuring the active participation of youth and for training staff. The CAIP approach to engaging youth has been primarily two-fold:

1. Raising awareness of youth issues and the importance of youth through seminars with the adults in the community: Recognizing the importance of increasing the awareness of adults, CAIP has provided seminars in its communities to discuss issues pertaining to youth unemployment and disenfranchisement, drugs and the future. Following these seminars, team members report noticing a more active involvement of youth on the CAGs. Although youth are not always as vocal on these groups, they articulate the importance of learning about their communities through these meetings, listening to the elders and understanding the process by which decisions are made.

2. Establishing mentoring programs for the infrastructure projects: Older people with technical skills mentor one or two young people during the construction part of the program. This builds upon an existing concept of apprenticeship within Uzbekistan. Young people are expected to contribute to manual labor in the program anyway, but this approach ensures that new skills are learned and fosters a sense of self worth in the young people. It is also an approach that is accessible to all young people in the community, not only the motivated bright children.

It is important to note that the relatively small representation of young people on the CAGs does not indicate a lack of community interest in their future. Talking to CAG representatives, over 70 percent raised problems for young people as a serious concern and 35 percent of the infrastructure projects in the initial 18 months of the program have been related to schools (see Appendix 3).

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6.10 Government involvement

One of the side effects of independence for the three countries in the Ferghana Valley has been a decrease in financial resources to the area and the gradual deterioration of social services. Communities talk with nostalgia about the Soviet era when government representatives took responsibility for the care and maintenance of most needs within the community. These days people feel neglected by their respective governments, “The valley’s inhabitants consider themselves to be at the end of the line for receiving state subsidies” (Tabyshalieva, 23). When asked in Sogment, Uzbekistan why the bathhouse had fallen into disrepair, community members replied that previously the government had managed it. The members could not understand that they might now be able to take on at least some of the responsibility.

Frustrations with the current government services run high although they are not always directly expressed due to fear that this may bring negative attention from officials. Several of the CAIP communities including Namangan, Takalik and Qo’qon were chosen primarily because of these frustrations. Both community mobilization programs tread a fine line; on the one hand it is important to inject resources into the community to address real infrastructure problems, on the other it is crucial that these resources are not seen as exonerating government from its responsibility or creating parallel systems.

CAIP and PCI are designed to help facilitate greater linkages and communication between communities and the government authorities at the municipal and regional level. CAGs must obtain the necessary approvals before projects are implemented and although PCI and CAIP staff know it would be quicker if they were to negotiate the approvals themselves, they believe it is essential to build these relationships between CAGs and the government authorities. Many communities claim that they received no visits from the municipal authorities before the programs started working in their communities, but now report that because of the PCI and CAIP infrastructure and social projects, there has been increased government communication and attention paid to their village or Mahalla.

While all locations have received attention from the government, levels of contribution have varied widely. It is important not to overestimate the lasting impact of this increased communication at this stage. While most communities report increased positive contact and support from the government and an improved relationship in the short-term, they are not optimistic about the prospects for long-term increased support once PCI or CAIP leave their communities. When asked how they would solve future infrastructure issues in the villages, only 25 percent of those interviewed thought that the local government was a resource to tap into, preferring instead to turn to other local or international organizations.

In the long-term, the goal has to be to increase resource flows in these provinces from the central government to the regional and local levels, so that CAGs or other community-based organizations can effectively advocate for their own needs. However, it is essential to recognize that this is not yet happening in any of the three countries, and Mercy Corps should put strategies in place for realistic expectations in the post CAIP/PCI context.

Learning to Advocate

One of the challenges in reducing conflict between government and community is in changing attitudes and approaches. Although communities relied on government systems for most things in the Soviet Union, communities now have very low expectations of what can be achieved and what government is prepared to do. In Pahtaabad, Tajikistan, the community wanted to buy a used bus because no public transport accessed the area. Concerns regarding sustainability and donor regulations meant that this was not possible, so instead PCI worked with the community to advocate to the government for their needs. After several months of discussions the government and community managed to persuade a private business to start up a service to the village (which is an ethnic Kyrgyz village), not only increasing inter-community contact but freeing up PCI resources for other projects.



Melinda Leonard/Mercy Corps

Elders in the community are important resources and participants in community projects.

7. Local Partnerships

Within the Ferghana Valley, Mercy Corps defines two types of partnerships as contributing to the long-term success of the programs: partnerships with the communities and partnerships with local NGOs.

Community partnerships: Both programs view their partnerships with the selected communities as essential for the success of the tangible community projects and seek to develop a relationship of mutual cooperation and understanding with each over the three-year period. This commitment to work together over an extended period ensures that when issues or disagreements arise, it is possible to resolve them together. Program staff explained that this long-term commitment contributes to the sustainability of the maintenance of the infrastructure projects because initial problems can be resolved together. In addition it helps strengthen and enforce practices in peaceful conflict resolution promoted during the community mobilization process.

The 25 or 30 percent match required respectively from PCI and CAIP through community contribution to the projects, either in labor, funds or materials, is a significant commitment to the partnership. It affirms that this is a mutual project and the communities must take ownership of the process. A memorandum of understanding is signed with the community for each infrastructure project in order to formalize the process. When the programs started, Mercy Corps anticipated difficulty achieving the match, whereas in reality, communities have often exceeded the amount required. This provides concrete affirmation that the communities value the projects. One CAG member in Urganjibog said that the community match was important because, “It makes us take ownership of the process, decide our priorities, and

ensures we will continue to look after the infrastructure when it is completed and it stops us from stealing!” It creates a much more equal relationship between international and local partners than is often found in sub-grant agreements.

Local NGO partnerships: An important relationship for PCI is with the local NGO partners who second individuals to work as part of the teams.²⁷ This unique relationship between local and international NGO partners ensures that a broad range of knowledge and skills are transferred to the communities. This creative approach to ensure genuine partnership that crosses borders, nationalities and ethnicities, was born out of observation of how other tolerance programs in the valley were limited by having mono-ethnic staff, or by not working on both sides of the borders.

Two of the local partners bring existing knowledge of working with communities and hopefully also ensure replicability in other communities after the end of PCI through their ongoing work. Each of the three smaller NGOs also bring specific skills to the program, respectively specific geographic knowledge, a broad base of volunteers with specific skills, and training in group facilitation based on an internationally recognized methodology.²⁸ There are challenges relating to the sustainability of funding for these smaller NGOs for the longer-term, and questions of their ability to operate once core costs are no longer met by Mercy Corps. The local partners are acutely aware of this, and they are starting to address the issue. If these challenges can be overcome, this model of peer partnership and two-way transfer of skills throughout the life span of the program is an exciting one that could be replicated elsewhere.

Another benefit of involving local partners in this way is that it also exposes them to the current situation outside of their own country. Due to the fact that crossing borders is extremely difficult for local people, local NGOs have tended to work on “their” side of the border on peace-building programs, with a counterpart on the other side. “The role of NGOs in grassroots inter-ethnic cooperation is still marginal. Among NGO members, social scientists, and students there have been relatively few opportunities to network and exchange ideas across state borders” (Tabyshalieva, 24). The PCI approach provides hands-on exposure to the different countries rather than only conferences and seminars. The eventual aim is to foster relationships between local partners, which will last beyond the lifetime of the program.

8. Team Building

The importance of staff selection is essential to achieving successful programs in the valley. Conflict resolution skills that can be practically applied are scarce and so team selection was founded on the principles of flexibility and openness to new ideas. An understanding of the grassroots communities and an understanding of how to make connections with formal and informal leaders in government, business and the civic sector were key considerations. Staff were recruited from within the Ferghana Valley, rather than looking for potentially more educated people from the capitals at the expense of an understanding of the local dynamics. Team members speak without exception about their belief in what they are doing. The mixture of ages, backgrounds and (in the case of PCI) ethnicities adds a level of accountability to the programs and reduces the temptations for the misappropriation of funds.

²⁷ See Appendix 4 for a summary of local NGO partners.

²⁸ The methodology comes from the Institute of Cultural Affairs based in the United States.

PCI's cross-border work led to particular emphasis on the building of the teams and a unique local NGO/international NGO relationship, which has been extremely successful in ensuring impartiality, transparency and accountability. At the same time, PCI has been modeling successful inter-ethnic cooperation to the communities in which the program works. Not only are teams composed of different ethnic groups, a model that has been successfully used in other parts of the world, they are also of different nationalities. Each team works in at least two different countries. In addition, the three-person teams are made up of a consortium of different Mercy Corps and local NGO representatives from five local organizations.

The logistics for ensuring that the teams can function efficiently are complex. Staff must have multiple entry visas and border officials are often suspicious of frequent border crossings for reasons they do not understand. In order to address this, PCI has created official documentation, which team members show to local officials and which greatly facilitates crossing. Communities (which are predominantly mono-ethnic) were initially surprised at the multi-ethnic teams, but there is consensus that this model helps demonstrate that Mercy Corps "walks the talk." Concrete proof of inter-ethnic cooperation within the teams has impressed local government and communities alike.

9. Sustainability

The CAIP and PCI programs are clearly the beginning of a process that will hopefully continue long after the end of the program and the benefits of the skills transferred will contribute toward mitigating potential conflict in the future. Community mobilization is the first step of a process to empower communities to take control of their own lives and find mutually acceptable solutions to their grievances. Sustainability and changing behaviors are critical for the future. As one team member expressed, "When you see a girl turning on a new water tap, you see the success of community mobilization; when you see her turning it off, you see the chances for sustainability."

The effectiveness and sustainability of the programs will need to be measured on multiple levels at the end of the programs:

1. Sustainability of the projects: The continued maintenance of the infrastructure projects will be a clear sign that the communities value and feel ownership of not only the infrastructure, but also of the process by which decisions have been made. Taking responsibility for communal resources that would formerly have been managed by the government is a difficult learning process. The advantage of a three-year commitment to communities means that Mercy Corps can work with communities during this cycle to help iron out initial management glitches.

2. Sustainability of CAGs: Ultimately, the communities will need to decide what model they want for the continuation or metamorphosis of CAGs after the end of the programs. Success and sustainability do not necessarily depend on a continued existence of CAGs in the form they are currently in for project implementation, but rather that the skills used are adopted as best practices within the communities in some form. At this relatively early point in program implementation, communities all express the desire to continue working after Mercy Corps' work is complete, but they have not thought through how they see the structure of these groups working. There are various organizational models which can be adopted, including

sector specific groups, community-based organizations or more formal, registered NGOs. At the very minimum, the programs aim to have empowered formal and informal leaders with skill sets that can mobilize people around issues as they arise in the community.

3. Sustainability of NGO partners: Local NGO partners who continue to work with communities using participatory methods of mobilization and who maintain contact with the selected communities will not only contribute toward the sustainability of the program, but will help disseminate the approach throughout the rest of the Ferghana Valley. The program is also looking to identify ways of supporting sustained cross border contact between different NGOs.

4. Sustainability of relationships: both CAIP and PCI place great importance on improving relationships and creating new mechanisms for resolving problems at all the levels addressed in Table 1 (page 9). For the programs to claim true success, these relationships must continue to grow, develop and expand after project activities end.

10. Measuring the Impact

Measuring the impact of the programs beyond the level of the community mobilization to understand how they reduce the potential for conflict is extremely difficult, not only because it is difficult to measure conflict “not happening” but also because there is so little literature available on conflict prevention and easily measurable indicators.

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The original design of CAIP and PCI is based on the assumption that the potential for conflict is reduced if the following indicators are achieved:

1. Increased shared resources between and within communities and the skills to manage them sustainably. Infrastructure projects are designed to benefit a majority, not a select minority. Most importantly, these projects address resource issues that were noted as causing tensions during the assessments in 2000. In addition, PCI promotes infrastructure projects that either link communities across borders or that connect a majority community with an ethnic minority community.

2. Increased positive contact and sustained relations between and within communities. The success of creating these relations at a community level, as well as between communities and government, is clearly visible in the number of social events taking place, the numbers of people attending (demonstrating community support) and government involvement in all infrastructure projects. Examples, such as the football league organized spontaneously between communities, indicate the possibility of sustainability of relations, but this needs to be carefully monitored as the programs continue.

3. Increased knowledge of and understanding between and within communities. The way in which Mercy Corps works promotes increased transparency and understanding between communities in societies that are not traditionally transparent. From public meetings to the publishing of budgets, from international summer camps to exchanges between CAGs, the program approach is to increase knowledge of how other communities are working. To date seven infrastructure projects have connected different communities.

4. Communities develop new problem solving skills. Skills transfer takes place both formally (through training, seminars and workshops) and informally when Mercy Corps staff model participatory ways of working in the communities. Community members all express appreciation for learning participatory methodologies and indicate that this is one of the primary differences in the way in which Mercy Corps works on projects (as opposed to government or other organizations). The test will be to measure whether community leaders and young people adopt some of these ways of working outside of Mercy Corps' programs.

The Table below summarizes how the activities undertaken in the two programs contribute to meeting the four criteria in the areas Mercy Corps aims to affect (see Table 1).

	Activity	Criteria
Transborder		
Community ↕ Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Joint social activities (festivals, leagues, international youth camps) - Infrastructure projects - Village exchanges (between CAGs, youth, etc.) - Joint training for representatives 	1,2 3 2 4
National		
Community ↕ Government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advocacy - Infrastructure projects - Community contributions - Invitations to participate in openings, social events, etc. 	1 1,2,3,4 1,4 1
Community ↕ Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consensus meetings (skills building) - Training - Infrastructure and social projects (builds links between communities) 	4 4 3
Community		
Inter-community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consensus meetings (skills building) - Participatory Rural Appraisal (builds awareness of the needs of all members of the community) - Training 	4 2,4 4
Community ↕ Village Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consensus meetings - Project selection process (builds skills in participation, joint problem solving and accountability) 	4 4
Youth ↕ Traditional Leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seminars with adults on issues relating to youth - Youth summer camps - Youth initiative groups - Mentor programs 	1,4 2,4 4 1,4

A USAID poll, which is due to begin in the summer of 2003 will measure the attitudes, skills and knowledge in the communities where CAIP is working, as well as some where it is not, over the next two years as a result of those activities. The information gathered will provide Mercy Corps and USAID with an indication of whether the programs are contributing toward an increased positive environment in selected communities across the valley, as well as an indication of whether this increases as the programs progress. It will provide a baseline against which to measure program success, particularly when looking at criteria one and four.

11. Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Program staff for both CAIP and PCI are constantly reviewing, analyzing and assessing impact and making recommendations for improving implementation. Flexibility is seen as key to developing an effective program responsive to the communities' needs. The following list summarizes the key findings from the first 18 months of community mobilization in the Ferghana Valley.

Programmatic

- **Accurate community selection** is essential for projects which target a relatively small number of sites relative to the overall population of the region and which then form the basis of a three-year relationship. Where community dynamics are complicated, it is important to invest sufficient time to make the right choices.
- **Understand the local context** and identify positive local customs and traditions to adapt and/or build upon to reinforce messages of peaceful change and conflict resolution. Do not assume that it is possible to directly transfer approaches from community mobilization programs in other countries.
- **Ensure participatory meetings.** Due to pressures of rapid startup and/or project implementation requirements, some mistakes were made early on when teams did not know enough about the community to know when a meeting was not truly representative or when a project benefited only a small portion of the community. Continuous PRA and intensive time in the communities has reduced the problem and allowed teams to more effectively facilitate community meetings.
- **Small, quick impact initial projects**, whether social or infrastructure, are critical to establishing trusting relationships with communities and are valued by the communities themselves as they grapple to understand some of the concepts and methodologies promoted by community mobilization programs and which may be new to them. They also help to quickly moderate negative stereotypes and suspicions of other communities and also of international organizations.
- **Model behaviors and approaches one wishes to promote** – whether transparency of approach or inter-ethnic teams, methodologies and skills are more likely to be adopted by communities if they are internalized within Mercy Corps' teams.
- **Document anecdotal successes and failures** – while qualitative “snapshots” of program successes provide an insight into a particular “moment in time,” collating multiple examples over the period of the program in a consistent manner will help build a bigger picture. It is important to document the weaknesses and problems as well, in order to avoid a skewed picture.

General

- **Baseline data** is critical in order to measure the changes in communities' attitudes and skills and to measure assumptions regarding conflict prevention. Where this is not possible, other ways of identifying change are critical. USAID has contracted an international partner to collect baseline data for all CAIP and PCI partners in Central Asia, starting summer 2003. As this will take place after the program start date, they will use “control” communities where international partners are not working. They will also have the opportunity to sample some of the communities included under the expansion where Mercy Corps has only recently begun to work.
- **Be cautious of terminology and jargon** – language, which is commonly accepted and non-controversial in the relief and development field may not resonate with communities and can

often lead to misunderstandings. Look to express the concepts in language and terms that make sense to the people we are trying to affect.

- **Understand local mechanisms for peaceful conflict resolution** and build upon them. This also emphasizes the importance of not blindly replicating programs, which are successful in one country or region, without a thorough analysis of the context and what local capacities for peace already exist.
- **Quality community mobilization programs are hands-on and time intensive.** Teams visit each community at least once a week. This regular contact allows relationships and trust to develop, and concepts and new skills to be truly internalized by the communities.
- **Recognize the key actors targeted** through the program, look for synergies with other organizations and try to identify opportunities for coordination or linking in with efforts to address causes of conflict at the macro level.
- **Sustainability** at all levels of the program needs to be addressed early on in order to prepare for the end of the program in time and to establish criteria for measuring success and impact after the program's end. To really measure the sustainability of programs, it will be necessary to return after the end of program implementation.
- **Articulate assumptions** – in programs where it is difficult to quantitatively measure progress toward meeting the goals and objectives (e.g. conflict prevention). Clearly articulating assumptions and proxy indicators early on is critical to ensuring clarity and focus of program implementation.
- **Building the capacity of local NGOs** needs to be an explicit activity to ensure sustainability for the future, not only implicit in program implementation.
- **Donor communication** – maintaining open communication with a supportive donor has been key to supporting program flexibility and responsiveness.

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12. Conclusions – Can community mobilization programs reduce the potential for conflict?

In order to determine the level of success of community mobilization programs to reduce the potential for conflict, it is essential to have clear assumptions and proxy indicators. Although these can and should be revisited as the program evolves, identifying and articulating assumptions from the outset facilitates the process of evaluation. The dynamics of conflict (or lack of conflict) are too complex for any one party to be able to claim definitive responsibility for. With multiple stakeholders living, working and operating in the Ferghana Valley, contributing to or obstructing peace, Mercy Corps does not operate in a vacuum.

The results of the USAID poll will hopefully highlight attitudinal and behavioral changes taking place in the communities where Mercy Corps is working and track these changes over time. However, in the interim it is possible to look at the four criteria established and conclude that if these are met, then community mobilization is indeed an effective tool for reducing the potential for conflict in individual communities. To date Mercy Corps has not explicitly tracked progress against these criteria, although

collected data indicates we are significantly contributing toward these. Revisions to data collection based on recent training in monitoring and evaluation and discussions arising from the results of this field study will mean that it is easier to directly track them in the future.

The community mobilization approach targets multiple stakeholders in the Ferghana Valley, addresses underlying tensions and the self-determined needs of the population, while at the same time building and strengthening relationships, and promoting participation and constructive problem solving approaches. It is effective because it addresses needs in a way that is of value to the communities themselves, rather than promoting abstract values of conflict prevention.

For programs to be able to claim to be truly effective beyond the individual communities in which they work, it is crucial to identify and build on opportunities for replication elsewhere in the valley. Mercy Corps has begun to tackle this issue through working with local partners and targeting government officials who will hopefully use these skills in their relationships with other communities.

Any claims for success must, however, be seen within the context of a deteriorating situation regarding living standards within the Ferghana Valley as compared with Soviet times (Tabyshalieva, 24), an increasing pressure on resources, and reduced cross border movement. These national and international level policies exacerbate the situation at the same time that Mercy Corps and other organizations are trying to promote peaceful change. Mercy Corps' programs can contribute toward a movement for peaceful resolution of issues but macro level players must simultaneously address these issues at the national level. The real impact of these programs will only become evident over time and will require improvements in linkages between macro and micro actors in the government, civic and business sectors.

13. Acronyms and Definitions

CAG/CIG	Community Action Group/Community Initiative Group
CAIP	Community Action Investment Program
ICA	Institute for Cultural Affairs
Mahalla	In Uzbekistan the basic administrative unit of the Republic is called the Mahalla , and is the unit used by CAIP to define community size. It usually averages about 2,000 residents whether in state/collective farms, apartment complexes, urban dwellings or village units. In Kyrgyzstan the equivalent administrative unit is the Ayil Ukumatu and in Tajikistan the Jamoat .
PCI	Peaceful Communities Initiative
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
RFA	Request for Applications
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

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15. Appendices

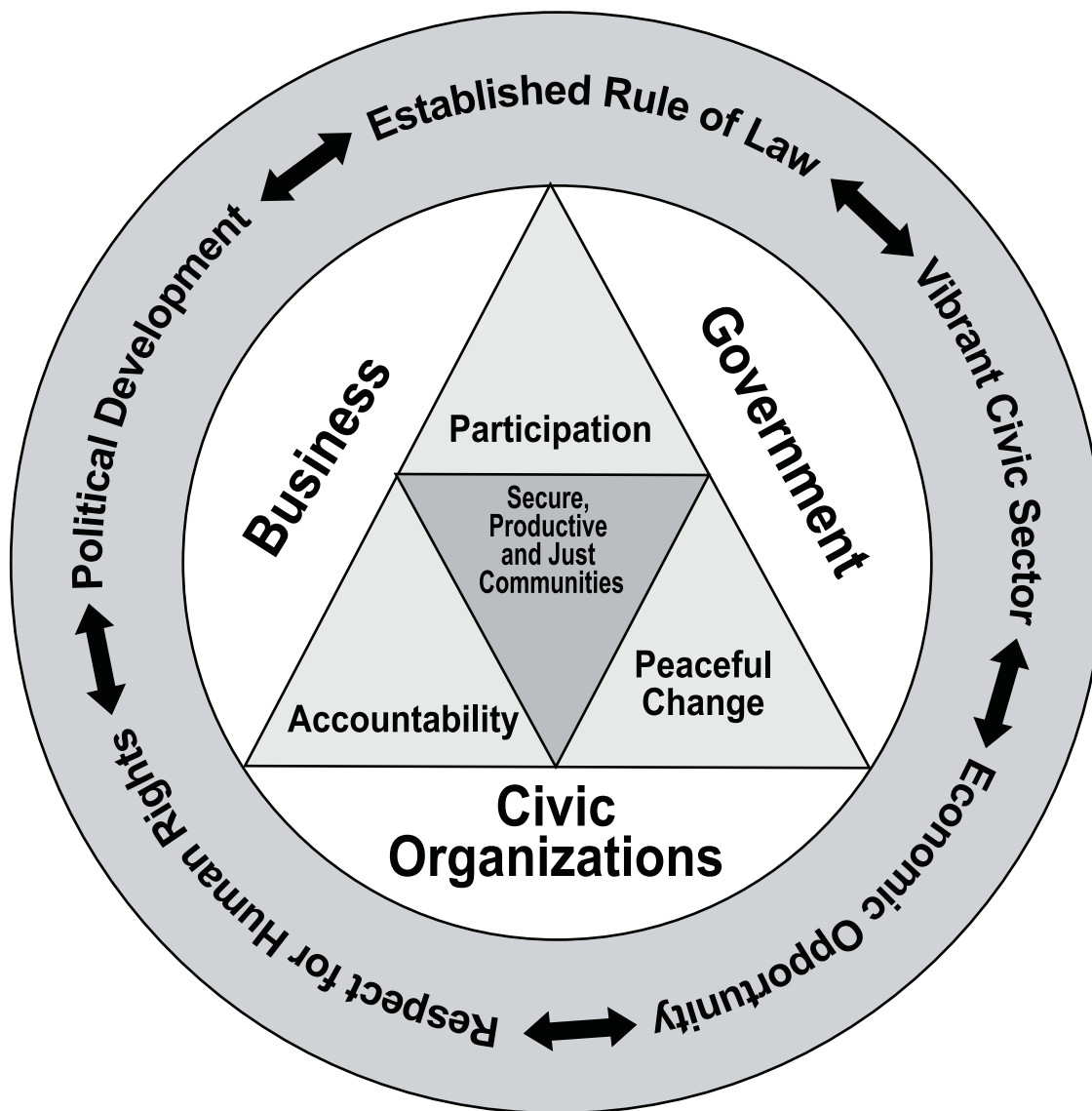
Appendix 1

PCI and CAIP Community Mobilization Cycle

CAIP and PCI have slightly different approaches to community mobilization. The steps below illustrate broadly how the process works although they differ slightly for each community.

1. A **preliminary list of communities** is drawn up through a combination of desk studies, visits to the community, PRA (one to two days) and consultations with local key actors (government, local NGOs, teams, etc.). This stage also provides the opportunity to inform local authorities about Mercy Corps' work and program and to gain approval for the programs.
2. **Initial recommendations** are made to the entire team and then communities selected through a voting process.
3. **Teams conduct intensive PRA** in the communities (four to ten days), involving focus groups of men, women, children, youth, elders, etc. Needs, resources and project possibilities are identified. Possible community representatives are identified and invited to the community meeting.
4. A **public community meeting** is held ensuring broad community representation of 40-70 people. Lessons learned and possible interventions are presented. Community members vote on their priorities and the top three are chosen.
5. A **Community Action Group (CAG) is selected by the community** (encouraged by Mercy Corps staff to include a broad representation of different interest groups). The CAG takes responsibility for:
 - Acting as a focal point for Mercy Corps and representing the community.
 - Assessing the feasibility of the projects.
 - Designing implementation plans, budgets, etc.
 - Leading the planning and construction of the projects.
 - Informing the communities and ensuring transparency.
 - Collecting and organizing community contribution.
6. **Project implementation** takes place accompanied by social events and training in key skills. Government authorities are engaged for approval, consultation, and in some cases, concrete contributions.
7. **The opening ceremony** celebrates the achievements of the community, publicly recognizes those who have contributed to the project and brings together key stakeholders (CAGs, Mercy Corps, government and other primary actors).
8. A **confirmation meeting** is held as another community meeting in order to share lessons learned, reassess priorities for future projects and determine next steps.
9. The project cycle (Steps 5-7) is repeated.

Charting a Healthy, Vibrant Civil Society



KEY

The Center: goal/outcome, possible with foundation of a healthy Civil Society

The Three Principles: behavior that characterizes a functioning Civil Society

The Actors: key players — the dynamic inter-relationship among these three sectors provides a foundation for positive social change

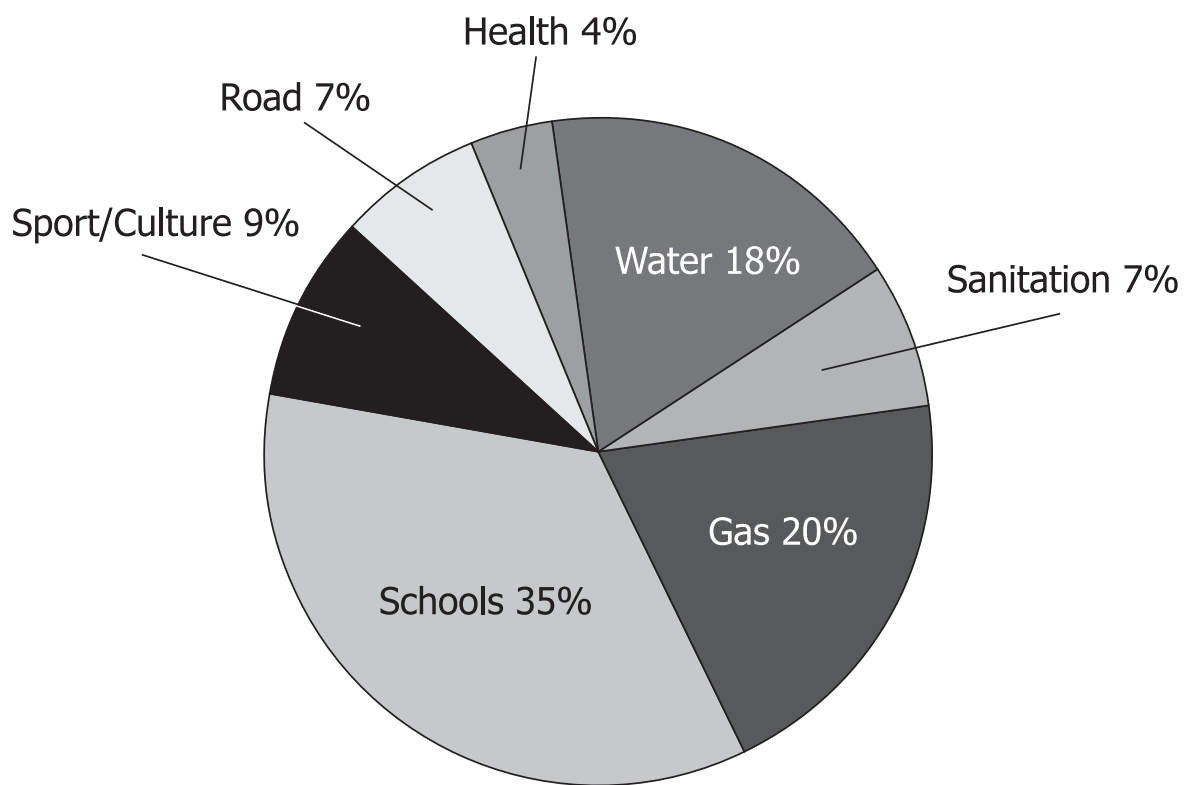
The Outer Ring: environment in which a healthy, vibrant Civil Society thrives

Appendix 3

Summary of Projects

Providing a project summary is slightly deceptive given the fluid nature of the programs and the fact that projects are currently ongoing as well as the fact that CAIP is gearing up towards larger scale projects. The table provides a snapshot of infrastructure projects completed or almost finished by May 31, 2003. Of particular interest is the high number of initial projects targeted at schools.

Infrastructure Projects - May 2003



Key facts and figures:

Average CAG size: 14 members

Average percentage of youth on CAGs: 19

Average percentage of women on CAGs: 22

Appendix 4

Peaceful Communities Initiative – Local NGO Partners

Mercy Corps has five local partners in the Ferghana Valley; three from Uzbekistan, one from Tajikistan and one from Kyrgyzstan. Each organization provides between one and four field officers to the program. The NGOs range from some of the strongest in Central Asia to small NGOs with little experience.

Business Women's Association, Uzbekistan: was established in 1991 and has 155 members of government, business and NGO sectors. Their primary goal is to stimulate economic activity for women and youth and to promote Civil Society principles. They have a wide range of programs including women's education, small-medium enterprise development and public health education. They conduct training in non-violent conflict resolution and have worked with a range of international partners including: Open Society Institute-Uzbekistan, Counterpart Consortium, Winrock International, American Bar Association, Pragma Corporation, Eurasia Foundation, Save the Children, United Nations, OSCE and others.

Fido Association, Uzbekistan: FIDO was established in 2001 with the support of Winrock International. Its mission is to improve the status of women and increase their role in social, economic and cultural life and develop women's leadership. In the past two years they have held over 90 seminars in Andijan Oblast raising awareness of women's rights. Fido also works with Soros Foundation to support women's education.

MEHR: Center for Social and Economic Development, Uzbekistan: MEHR is the only registered NGO in Sokh. MEHR was established primarily to work on PCI, and is one of the few NGOs in Uzbekistan to be located in the rural areas it is serving. MEHR's mission is to improve quality of life for the local population. Being the only NGO in Sokh, MEHR has become the bridge for international organizations working in the area.

Foundation for Tolerance International, Krygystan: Officially registered as an NGO in 1998 the organization's mission is "the prevention and resolution of inter-ethnic conflicts in Central Asia." The organization originated in the UNHCR's project "Conflict Transformation and Tolerance Education" which began in March 1996 as a part of a UNHCR strategy on violent conflict prevention. The Head Office is located in Bishkek and its regional offices, Osh, Ak-Suu, Isfana and Batken, are located within the regions most affected by inter-ethnic conflict. FTI is one of the largest NGOs in the Ferghana Valley and has multiple international donors including the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), UNHCR, USAID and the Germany Embassy.

ICA-EHIO, Tajikistan: The Institute for Cultural Affairs (ICA) is a global network of NGOs aiming to develop and implement effective approaches to personal, organizational and social transformation. ICA-EHIO was the first affiliated office to be opened in the former Soviet Union and aims to provide facilitation training in the Technology of Participation (ToP®) to the government, private and NGO sector for Tajik society.

Mercy Corps is an international relief and development agency that exists to alleviate suffering, poverty and oppression by helping people build secure, productive and just communities. Since 1979, Mercy Corps has been assisting people afflicted by conflict or disaster by implementing programs that increase food security, economic opportunity and the development of civil society.



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